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BIBLE CHARACTERS

BY

CHARLES READE, D.C.L.

AUTHOR OF

"IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO MEND" "A WOMAN-HATER"

"LOVE ME LITTLE, LOVE ME LONG" ETC.

NEW YORK

HARPER & BROTHERS, FRANKLIN SQUARE

1889

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BIBLE CHARACTERS.

I.

A LITERARY MARVEL.

THE characters in Scripture are a literary marvel.

It is very hard to write characters in one country to be popular in every land and age.

Especially hard in narrative. (Drama parades characters by numberless speeches, and autographs them by soliloquy—an expedient false in nature, but convenient in art.)

Hardest of all to create such world-wide and everlasting characters in few words, a bare record of great things said and done.

One test of difficulty is rarity : number, then,

the world-wide characters—if any—in Thacydides and Herodotus, and observe whether Josephus, when he leaves watering the Bible and proceeds to supplement it, has added one deathless character to the picture-galleries of Holy Writ. Shall we carry the comparison higher, and include poetic narrative? then go to the top of the tree at once, and examine the two great epics of antiquity.

The ‘Æneid’—what a stream of narrative! what fire of description! what march and music of words! But the characters?—Æneas mediocre, his staff lay figures. Dido just interesting enough to make one angry with Æneas. Perhaps the strongest colour is in the friendship and fate of Nisus and Euryalus; and there a Jewish pen had shown the way.

The less polished but mightier Homer has achieved the highest feat of genius; he has made puny things grand, and fertilized pebbles. He has bewitched even scholars into thinking his Greeks wiser and braver than the Trojans; whereas, if you can shut your ears to his music,

his Greeks were barbarians besieging a civilized city for a motive and in a manner incompatible with one ray of civilization. The motive : from the first dawn of civilization no country with independent states ever got those states to unite in leaving home and besieging a distant city to recover the person of a solitary adulteress. The manner: the first dawn of civilization showed men that cities placed like Troy can always be taken by one of two methods, blockade or assault. But Homer's Zulus had neither the sense to blockade that civilized city and starve it out, nor the invention to make ladders, covered ways, and battering-rams, nor the courage to scale walls, nor even to burn or break through a miserable gate. The civilized Trojans had a silver currency, the Tyrian shekel, called by scholars with Homer on the brain 'the Homeric shekel.' Homer never mentions it, never saw it. The uncivilized Greeks had no currency but bullocks ; no trade but exchange of commodities. The attack and defence of Troy were of a piece with the two currencies : the civilized Orientals, with a silver

currency, barred out the Zulus, with a bullock currency and calves' brains, like a pack of school-boys, and showed their contempt of them by coming out and attacking them in the open with their inferior numbers. Yet the genius of Homer could dazzle men's eyes, and bewitch their ears, and confound their judgments, and sing black white. So behold the barbarians gilt for ever, and the civilized people smirched. *Carent quia vate sacro.*

But turn from the glories of the wondrous tale this magician has built on a sorry subject—fitter for satire than epic—to his characters, and he is no longer supreme.

To be sure, he does not dose us with monotonies, abstractions, lay figures; *fortemque Gyan, fortemque Cloanthum*: he discriminates the brute courage of Ajax and the airy valour of Tydides, the wisdom of Nestor and the astuteness of Ulysses. But his gods and goddesses?—mere human animals; blue blood for red, and there ends his puerile invention in things divine. His leading heroes are characters, but not on a par

with his descriptions, his narrative, and his music. They are the one ephemeral element in an immortal song. Achilles, with his unsoldier-like egotism, his impenetrable armour, his Zulu cruelty to his helpless foe, and his antique tender friendship, is a brave Greek of the day, but he is not for all time; two-thirds of him no modern soldier would deign to copy.

The twenty-four books devoted by so great a poet to Ulysses have not engraved 'the much-enduring man' on the Western heart. In short, the leading heroes of Homer's epics are immortal in our libraries, but dead in our lives.

Now take the two little books called Samuel. The writer is not a great master like Homer and Virgil; he is artless, and careless to boot; forgets what he had said a few pages before, and spoils more than one good incident by putting the cart before the horse—I mean by false transposition, by presenting events out of their true and interesting sequence: a sad fault in composition. But the characters that rise from the historical strokes of that rude pen are immortal: so solid,

and full of colour, too, that they stand amidst the waves of time like rocks, carved into statues by Phidias, and coloured by Apelles.

Yet this writer has no monopoly of the art in ancient Palestine; he shares it with about sixteen other historians, all Hebrews, though some of them write Hebrew and some Greek.

In our day character-painting is much attempted by certain writers of fictitious narrative; but their method excludes them from a serious comparison with Homer, Virgil, and the sacred historians. They do not evolve characters by simple narration. They clog the story with a hundred little essays on the character of each character. They keep putting their heads from behind the show, and openly analyzing their pale creations, and dissecting them, and eking them out with comments, and microscoping their poodles into lions. These are the easy expedients of feeble art. They succeed with contemporaries, and, indeed, are sure to be popular for a time, because most readers have slow or lazy minds, and love a writer who will save them the

trouble of studying and penetrating character by doing it for them in the very text of the story. But it would be paying this false method—which microscopes real mediocrity into false importance—too great a compliment to compare its fruits with the characters that are self-evolved in the sacred writers, and, indeed, in Homer and Virgil, for their *method* was, at all events, the true one, though its results in the single particular of character were inferior.

In further support of my present position let me submit a few truths to be taken in conjunction.

First. Moderate excellence in writing is geographical; loses fifty per cent. in human esteem by crossing a channel or a frontier.

Second. Translation lowers it ten per cent.

Third. But when you carry into the West a translation of a work the East admires ever so much, ten to one it will miss the Western mind. Eastern music is a dreamy noise to a Western ear, but one degree beyond the sweet illogical wail of an *Æolian* harp. Eastern poetry is to the

Western a glue of honeyed words, a tinkling cymbal, or a drowsy chime. The sacred Koran, the Bible of a hundred million Orientals, is to your Anglo-Saxon the weakest twaddle that ever drivelled from a human skull. It does not shock an Occidental Christian, or rouse his theological ire. It is a mild emetic to his understanding, and there's an end of it.

Fourth. The world is a very large place: Palestine is a small province *in the East*.

Fifth. What the whole world outside Palestine could very seldom do at all, this petty province did on a very large scale. About seventeen writers, all Israelites, some of them with what would nowadays be called a little learning, some without, some writing in Hebrew, some in Greek, all achieved one wonder. They sat down to record great deeds done, and great words spoken in Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia, and Palestine, which districts united are but a slice of the East, and they told them wondrous briefly, yet so that immortal and world-wide characters rise like exhalations from the record.

Written in the East, these characters live for ever in the West; written in one province, they pervade the world; penned in rude times, they are prized more and more as civilization advances; product of antiquity, they come home to the business and bosoms of men, women, and children in modern days.

Then, is it any exaggeration to say that 'THE CHARACTERS OF SCRIPTURE ARE A MARVEL OF THE MIND ?

II.

AIDS TO FAITH.

OF a remarkable phenomenon the cause or causes must be remarkable. Any humdrum explanation of a marvel denounces itself; in the matter of solution 'inadequate' means 'unscientific.'

Perhaps the wisest plan will be not to hurry to an explanation, but examine the phenomenon in detail, and that may give us glimpses of a real and sufficient solution.

THE CHARACTERS OF SCRIPTURE ARE A PART OF ITS TRUTH, AND AIDS TO REASONABLE FAITH IN A MATTER WHERE FAITH IS A BOON AND DISBELIEF A CALAMITY.

The Bible contains many things that were hard to believe at the time, and many things

that are very hard to believe now. It was the prophecies, I think, that encountered the most reasonable incredulity at the date of their delivery; but now it is the histories, or portions of them; for in our day so many of the prophecies, minute and improbable at the time, have been fulfilled to the letter, that old prophecy tends to convert the reason to faith. Well, in a minor degree the close study of character in Scripture commends to our reason the truth of many strange incidents with which these true characters are indissolubly united.

This is mere preliminary discourse, so an example or two must serve. Many more will follow, if God should enable a broken old man to complete the work he has had the hardihood to begin.

Well, then, we are told in Judges, chapter xiii., that an angel, in the likeness of a man, foretold to Manoah, and also to his wife, that they should have a son, who should deliver Israel. The hospitable pair desired to feast this friendly prophet with a kid. But he declined, and advised them

to offer it to God. So they offered the kid as a burnt-offering. Lo ! as the fire rose high, their visitor went up in the flame, and then melted into the air. They fell trembling on their faces, quivering with terror.

This is a miracle ; we never see miracles nowadays ; and as it is natural, though fallacious, to think our narrow experience is the experience of all time and place, we find it very hard to believe them.

But please follow this narrative into character.

‘ And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God. But his wife said unto him, If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would he have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these.’

A great emergency always reveals people’s characters, and here are two characters suddenly developed in a pair that looked alike till then ; but now one is all blind superstitious terror, the

other all clear logic and good sense. Was this invented, and blind superstition assigned to the male, clear logic to the female? And that in the East, where women were deemed inferior, and by sure consequence made inferior.

Youth has its difficulties; but so has scepticism. Learned reason cannot readily believe that an Oriental writer invented this un-Oriental dialogue.

Reason suggests that this character-dialogue was really spoken by some superstitious man and logical woman.

Well, but if so, *à propos* of what were both speeches spoken?

Clearly it was *à propos* of something strange and thrilling that had *stirred* these two characters to their depths, and elicited the hitherto unsuspected superiority of the wife, though Oriental.

It is hard to find a fact that could fit this character-dialogue so thoroughly as the recorded miracle does with all its details; yet the character-dialogue bears Truth engraved on its face,

and so it becomes one of the aids to Faith—a humble one, of course.

John relates that Mary Magdalene told Peter and the other disciple Christ's sepulchre was open, and His body risen again, and immediately both those disciples ran to the sepulchre; the other disciple outran Peter, and got there first, but hesitated at the entrance; then Peter came up and rushed in at once, and the other followed him.

Now, John did not trouble himself to account for this apparent inconsistency in the rapidity of those two disciples; he merely recorded the facts. But we, who study his lines far more than he ever studied them, come to this passage with the knowledge (1) that Peter was not a youth, and (2) that he was the most ardent and impetuous of all the Apostles. We therefore see what John does not indicate, the true significance of the two seemingly incongruous facts he records so simply; it was just this—the younger *legs* got first to the outside of the tomb; the more ardent and impetuous *character* rushed first into the awe-inspiring place where his Lord had lain.

This stroke of character, unconsciously revealed by simple statement of fact, lays hold of our reason, and aids it—so far as it goes—to believe a thing that would be utterly incredible but for the weight and variety of the evidence, cotemporary, continuous, and monumental.

Mary and Martha of Bethany are presented to us in three fragments of narrative—one by Luke, two by John, and no apparent concert between the writers—indeed, a clear absence of it.

In the first passage, which is by Luke, they appear, one as a bustling housewife, the other a pious student; very distinct characters, though both thoroughly feminine; and there Luke leaves them (Luke x. 38-42).

In the second passage, which is by John, bereavement effaces their superficial distinction for a time, and they are both tender women (John xi. 21-25).

In the third passage the keynote, struck by Luke, is returned to by John, and the women seem to differ entirely in his page as they had done in Luke's (John xii. 2, 3).

BEFORE THE SICKNESS OF LAZARUS.

‘ And a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone ? bid her therefore that she help me ’ (Luke x. 38-40).

Mary, not a word.

WHEN LAZARUS WAS LYING DEAD.

Martha, who was the greater gossip, and heard news soonest, ran to meet Jesus outside the village, and at sight of Him, the first cry of her true woman’s heart was, ‘ Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother would not have died.’

An hour later Mary heard He was in the village, and she ran, the gentle Mary, and clung passionately to His knees ; and what was the first cry of her woman’s heart ? ‘ Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother would not have died.’

The very words Martha had spoken; and if you ask me why such opposite characters said the same thing, I must reply out of Molière: '*Ne voyez-vous pas que c'est la Nature pure qui vous parle?*'

Calamity effaces even broad distinctions, if they lie above the hearts. Behold the bustling housewife and the gentle student equally merged in loving, trusting woman! (John xi. 21-32).

AFTER LAZARUS WAS RESTORED TO LIFE.

Jesus came to Bethany, and supped with that family He had made the happiest in Judæa. Lazarus was amongst those who sat at meat.

Martha served.

Mary took a pound of ointment of spikenard—very precious—and anointed the feet of Jesus (John xii. 2, 3).

Now, did physician Luke sit down in one place and coin these two names, and invent their characters, so opposite in household matters?

Did fisherman John sit down in another place, and adopt Luke's names, yet out of his own in-

vention present Luke's bustling housewife and his absorbed student as one woman in the depths of the heart ?

Did this same John afterwards go back in his invention, Heaven knows how, to Luke's keynote, and present his one-hearted mourners as women differing greatly in every-day life, and especially in their way of honouring a beloved guest ?

This solution is incredible, and no man sees its absurdity more clearly than a veteran writer of fiction ; such a man knows the artifices of art and the limits of art. Now, here the artifices are absent, and the limits surpassed.

No ; the sisters of Bethany were real creatures, written about piecemeal by two independent writers, who each recorded what little he knew about them.

Thus handled, they differ from each other in domestic character, but agree in the deeper affections, and they never differ so much from each other as they both do from the male of our species.

But in truth nobody doubts that these were real characters that differed, and real hearts that agreed.

What has not been universally observed is that the reality of the characters is inseparable from the truth of the narrative, and stands or falls with it.

The whole record occupies only five verses in Luke and fourteen in John, and the characters are not created on the modern plan; they exist only by the facts. Try to believe the characters, yet doubt the facts; you will find you cannot really do it. If you are as honest and resolute as the thing deserves, you will come to this: either both the characters are a daring fiction concocted *miraculously* by a fisherman and a doctor, writing in different places and at different times, or else the facts, which exhale the characters like a rose its perfume, are as true as those characters are.

If the Old and New Testament, looked into, should be found to teem with examples of this sort, was I wrong to say that 'The characters of

Scripture are a part of its truth, and aids to reasonable faith in a matter where faith is a boon and disbelief a calamity'?

But if the characters of Scripture are both a marvel of the mind and also aids to faith, surely we ought to give up skimming them, and study them. Put them at their lowost, and they are a gold-mine; and in that mine surface-washing has been productive; but to dig is better.

I begin purposely with one of the smaller characters. A place is not vouchsafed him in the old collections of Bible characters, and even of late he has been disposed of in a page or two as one of 'the lesser lights.' But who knows? we may rate him higher if we study, not skim, him.

III.

NEHEMIAH.

ONCE in the history of mankind a mortal man told a nation its history in detail, predicting the near and the distant future so distinctly that both seemed to lie equally close to his eye on one map of events. (Deuteronomy xxviii., xxix., xxx.)

In our little (so-called) predictions we go by two guides—experience of the past, and shrewd calculation of the future founded on that experience. But this diviner had no help from either of those guides to the future; on the contrary, the things he foretold were unprecedented, inconsistent with each other, incredible, and to human reason absurd.

(1.) You shall drive out all the nations that

now inhabit Canaan; shall take that land and hold it.

(2.) If you keep the divine law I have just promulgated, you shall enjoy that country, and its soil shall teem with fruitfulness.

(3.) If you do not keep this divine law, that land and you shall wither under every curse that can strike man, beast, and soil, and at last you shall be driven out of it.

(4.) If after that you shall repent, and turn again to God and His commandments, He will pity you, and turn your captivity, and restore you, and punish your enemies, who have afflicted you with His consent, but with no good motive on their part.

Now, here was a string of inconsistent improbabilities.

(1.) The land of Canaan was held by warlike tribes, with cavalry, chariots of war, and walled cities.

The Hebrews were a half-armed infantry, encumbered with a mob of women and children. They had no strongholds, but must advance on

the Canaanites from tents, and retreat to tents whenever worsted, either in skirmish or drawn battle.

(2.) To conquer Canaan and its cities from tents, they must by degrees master the art of war so thoroughly that, with their proved superiority as soldiers, and the fortresses acquired by that conquest, no nation could dispossess them, still less transplant them to a distance.

(3.) Suppose, as a wild hypothesis, the improbable conquest and incredible transplantation of such a people accomplished: that expatriated mass would then, as a matter of course, blend with the greater nation that received them.

(4.) In two more generations the absorbed and absorbing people would be so compact, that it could not possibly be decomposed, and the Hebrew multitude return spontaneously by miracle as they had been exported by miracle.

Yet every tittle of the incredible and contradictory romance Moses foretold came true.

That half-armed infantry drove out the warriors of Canaan, and took their land, and obeyed God's law there, and reaped the promised blessings *till Joshua and the elders who knew him and survived him were all dead*: a remarkable fact, which merits profound study, and has been skimmed accordingly. But they left a few idolaters, and these leavened them, so that in time idolatry and the true worship flourished side by side. Sometimes one had the upper hand, sometimes the other. Neither was ever extinct. Now, nations are not like individuals; they cannot be judged at all in the next world, and even in this world they must be judged by their majorities. This people, then, were judged in this world by their fluctuating majorities, and alternately cursed and blessed for about nine hundred years. Yet, though the double prediction of Moses was all this time recorded, and read out at times to the people, and though alternate blessings and curses were its running comment and illustration, they could never make up their minds unanimously whether to

worship the God of Israel and be blessed, or false gods and be cursed.

At last, when they were proved incurable in Canaan, the long-predicted chastisement fell on them. Israel, being the greater idolater, was carried away captive first. Judah soon followed, and her desecrated Temple was despoiled and destroyed. Part of the nation was slaughtered in battle or famished on the road; a few thousands of the lower sort remained at home, but without their Temple, their rites, their national existence. The cream of Judah and Israel were really transported to Babylon and its neighbourhood, by a monarchy which had long practised that prodigious kind of transplantation. (See Herodotus, *passim*.)

Even now, according to Moses, this people might repent; and if so, they would return to their own land, and their captors suffer in turn.

But humanly speaking, what chance was there that Israelites or Jews would unlearn idolatry at Babylon? Why, what had all their idolatry

come of?—Imitation. Under the early Judges they could not as a nation withstand the example of a few conquered idolaters, who worshipped false gods in groves for want of temples. In the height of their glory their wisest king was decoyed into idolatry by the example of his intellectual inferiors, his wives and concubines. Imitation and example set them bowing at one time to a contemptible fish-god ; at another to a fiend whose worship entailed the burning of their children. Now, at Babylon idolatry was example and authority into the bargain. At Babylon idolatry was glorious, sublime ; had every charm and seduction to win the sensual understanding and divert it from the unseen God.

If you and I and an archangel had been endowed with absolute power, but left to our own wisdom, human and angelic, I am persuaded that neither that archangel nor you nor I should have sent the Hebrews to Babylon to unlearn idolatry ; so wide and impassable is the gulf between the sagacity of created beings and the

genuine prescience that marks their Creator—for constant prescience implies omniscience.

Babylon, bright centre of captivating idolatry, commenced an everlasting cure of Jewish idolatry, which punishments, blessings, miracles, could never effect in the land of Canaan. I keep in reserve a comment or two on this historical curiosity.

Meantime, 'sweet were the uses of adversity' The captivity roused great examples of faith, revived the necessity for miracles—and so miracles came—reawakened the lyre of Judah, which had slept since the days of David, and stirred up the noblest army of prophets that ever preached in any period of Hebrew story.

The Book of Daniel, the most sustained and grandest of all the prophetical and historical books, was written in Babylon itself, and partly in the Chaldaic tongue.

Ere long that impregnable city, Babylon, falsified its past history, defied all human probability, and bowed to Hebrew prophecy. Behind its enormous walls, it had laughed in-

vaders to scorn for centuries ; yet it was taken a few years after it had torn that suffering people from their land.

Cyrus, descendant of the conqueror, had no sooner succeeded to the throne of Persia, to which Babylon and Palestine were now equally subject, than he issued a most remarkable edict ; he alleged Divine inspiration, and by order of the Most High—as he declared—invited the Jews to go up to Jerusalem and build the Temple to Him whom he, Cyrus, proclaimed to be the true God. He restored to the Jews their sacred vessels, and assisted them with his vast resources.

The leader of this return was Zerubbabel. When the returned captives laid the foundation of the new Temple, there came a touch of nature which never, whilst books endure, shall pass from the memory of mankind. The young and the middle-aged praised God with shouts of joy ; but many of the priests and Levites, who were ancient men, and had seen the first Temple in its glory, wept with a loud voice ; so that such as stood apart could not discern the noise

of the shouts of joy from the noise of the wailing of those aged men.

Yet the leaders of the heathen nations that were settled in Judea baffled this good work by their intrigues for twenty-one years, and then at last the Temple was built and dedicated. But none of those poor old men lived to weep again, comparing the finished Temple with Solomon's in all its glory.

Besides the new Temple and its services, the restored Jews had prophets, especially Haggai and Zachariah, and no doubt there was a great revival. But it is clear that in the course of years there was a decline; and fifty-seven years after the rebuilding of the Temple, Ezra went up from Babylon to purify the degenerating descendants of those pious patriots.

The support Ezra had from Artaxerxes, king of Persia, and consequently of Babylon, his touching gratitude to that monarch and to Him who 'is enthroned in the heart of kings,' the abuses he found rampant, his tears and ardent prayers to God, his temporary success, and the

great revival of the law he inaugurated, *Dei gratia*, are written in the last four chapters of the book that bears his name.

About fourteen years after this revival, and ninety-two years after the edict of Cyrus, Singleheart stepped upon the scene. He was a Jew, born probably in Persia, and rose, in spite of his origin, by rare ability, to a high place in the service of Artaxerxes. His title was cup-bearer; but all such titles are misleading. He was a statesman and a courtier, and it was only one of his duties to taste the wine before he poured out for the king, and so secure him at his own risk against poison. This royal favourite, bred in soft Persia and lodged in those earthly paradises, the summer palace and winter palace of his monarch, had yet 'Jerusalem written on his heart.'

It was what they call winter in Persia, but what we should call balmy spring. Singleheart, better known as Nehemiah, was leading a life of delights with the king at Shushan, when

Hanani, a pious Jew, who had gone with a company to visit Jerusalem, returned from that journey. Nehemiah questioned him eagerly about their city and countrymen.

Then Hanani and his fellows hung their heads, and told Nehemiah that the remnant of the captivity in that land were in great affliction and reproach; the wall of Jerusalem, also, was broken down, and the gates burned with fire.

See now how Jerusalem was beloved by her exiled sons! Born, bred, and thriving in soft, seductive Persia, the true-hearted Jew Nehemiah was struck down directly by these words. He who had a right to stand on the steps of the greatest throne in the world sat down upon the ground, and fasted and wept and prayed before the God of heaven; and this was his confession and his prayer: 'O Lord God of heaven . we have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses. Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses,

saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations : but if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them ; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there. . . . O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name : and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.'

Public men are slaves as well as masters, their consciences seldom their own, their time never. Neither their pleasures nor their griefs can be long indulged. The bereaved statesman is not allowed to be quiet and to mourn ; he must leave the new grave and the desolate home for his arena, sometimes must even take part in a public festivity with a bleeding heart. This very thing befell Nehemiah. Like the poor actor who must go from a home with a coffin to play his part in comedy, and laugh and fool with the rest, sad

Singleheart had soon to rise from his knees, and don his gay raiment and mingle in a brilliant and jocund scene.

Great Artaxerxes gave a superb banquet to his nobility: the queen was there—no every-day event. You may let loose your imagination without fear; it will not go beyond the splendours of the Persian court on that occasion. Gold plate by the ton, gorgeous silk dresses of every hue, marble pillars, fountains, music, lights to turn night into day, slaves, sultanas, courtiers resplendent as stars, and all worshipping their sun Artaxerxes; smiling when he smiled, laughing when he laughed, applauding him to the echo, and thinking it little to say of this king of monarchs what Eastern adulation could say later on of a little trumpery prince, 'It is the voice of a god.'

It was Singleheart's duty to present the cup to this earthly divinity. So he took up the golden goblet, filled it ceremoniously, and offered it with a deep obeisance, as he had often done before; but now for the first time with a sorrowful face.

This was so strange a thing in him, or indeed

in any courtier, that the king noticed it at once; even as he took the cup his eye dwelt on this sad face, and he said directly, 'Why is your countenance sad?'

Nehemiah was too much taken aback to reply. The king questioned him again. 'You are not sick?'

Still no reply.

'This is sorrow, and nothing else.

Then Nehemiah was sore afraid, and I will tell you why. His life was in danger. Even a modern autocrat like Louis XIV. expected everybody's face to shine if he did but appear, and how much more an Artaxerxes! What, wear a sorrowful face when he was presiding over joy and gaiety, and gilding them by his presence! If he had ordered this melancholy visage away to prison or death, it would have been justified by precedent, and loudly applauded on the spot by all the guests.

But though Nehemiah felt his danger, yet the king's actual words were not menacing, and the courtier found courage to tell the simple truth.

He salaamed down to the ground. 'Let the king live for ever!' After this propitiatory formula he replied, 'Why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and its gates are burned with fire?'

These are brave words, and can be read aggressively; only that is not how Nehemiah spoke them. It was his to propitiate, not to offend, and his tones were broken-hearted and appealing, not contumacious.

You must read the words so, if you would be one in a thousand, and really understand them.

The king answered him accordingly. 'What do you ask of me?' said he.

Then Nehemiah set us all an example. He did not answer the king out of his own head, and pray for wisdom six hours afterwards, because it was bed-time. He prayed standing on the spot, and, like a skilful gunner, shot the occasion flying. Strengthened by ejaculatory prayer, the soul's best weapon, he said, 'If it please the king, and if thy servant has found favour in thy sight,

pray send me to Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it.'

The king's answer was rather favourable. He was unwilling to lose a good servant for ever, and asked him how long he wished to be away; but this was as much as to say he should go upon conditions.

When that one point was settled, and leave of absence conceded, Nehemiah got bolder and bolder. He asked for passports where needed, and an order on Asaph for timber, etc. The liberal monarch granted all, and even volunteered a cavalry escort to see him safe to the end of that long and perilous journey. In recording the first of these petitions the autobiographer, Nehemiah, suddenly informs us that the queen was sitting by the king's side. This looks as if he connected her somehow in his own mind with his petition and the king's bounty, and rather favours the notion that she was the famous Esther, and sympathized then and there with her sad countryman by look or gesture.

So Singleheart left the lap of luxury and rode

with his escort from Shushan to Jerusalem. This ride passes for nothing in the Biblical account; whether it is so we can best ascertain by doing it ourselves.

He reached Jerusalem, and showed rare wisdom the first day. Instead of proclaiming himself and his credentials, and going boldly to work, he lay quiet three days, doing nothing and learning everything, especially who would be likely to support him, who to oppose him.

On the third day, in the middle of the night, he rose and took with him, not his Persian escort to make a clatter of hoofs and a parade, but a few trusty men on foot, and even to them he did not reveal 'what God had put into his heart to do at Jerusalem.' So, with his secret locked at present in his breast, he passed out by the gate of the valley and round the city, and under the silver light of the moon and stars viewed the clean gaps, the burned fragments of the gates, and the jagged breaches in the walls of the holy city. It was the right time to gaze on a great and fallen city: such a ruin is sad but beautiful in that tender light.

The same stars that shone above it and upon it had glittered upon Solomon's Temple, his impregnable walls, his imperial power.

As Nehemiah looked on this contrast, piteous yet lovely beneath those unchanging stars, he wept, he prayed, he drank in the scene; and methinks it never left his mind in the good fight he fought thereafter by night as well as day.

Nehemiah was a layman, and had a layman's good sense in religion; walls were necessary to the safety and glory of the city. They were also necessary to true religion. Idolaters must be kept out of the city, or idolatry could never be kept out of the Jewish mind. The whole history of the nation showed this.

Fresh from that starlight picture Nehemiah went to the Jewish nobles, priests, and princes, showed the powers he held under the hand of Artaxerxes, and urged them to rebuild the walls and revive the national glory. He has not told us what he said; but it is clear he found words of rare eloquence; for they all caught fire directly, and cried out, 'Let us rise and build.'

IV.

NEHEMIAH'S WORK.

SINGLEHEART, BUILDER.

THEN this wise man strengthened zeal with method. Under his advice each powerful man took his own piece of the dilapidated wall, and repaired it with his people.

This may seem a small thing to hasty readers, but it was a master-stroke of genius. Not only was it a grand division of labour, but it animated the work with a noble emulation and a personal pride. 'See how fast my work goes on!' 'See how well my piece is done!' 'Now, my sons, gird up your tunics, or Rephaiah the son of Hur will get ahead of us.'

There were forty-six building parties, and leading women amongst them, the daughters of

Shallum, a powerful man. I apprehend the individual builders were not less than three thousand; so the walls began to rise like an exhalation.

The good cannot monopolize foresight. Evil men soon see when their interests are threatened. The heathen leaders showed their teeth at once; but at first they underrated the power of zeal under a wise and earnest leader. Their weapon was scorn. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem inquired ironically whether Nehemiah meant to take the place of Artaxerxes. Nehemiah replied, 'I am God's servant, and mind your own business; you have no portion, nor right, nor memorial in Jerusalem.'

When the walls began to rise as if by magic, Sanballat got frightened, but still brazened out his anxiety with ridicule. 'What are these feeble Jews up to? Will they fortify themselves? Will they set up their sacrifices again? Will they turn the rubbish back into stones to build with?'

'A stone wall,' says Tobiah, 'ay, the sort of

wall a fox couldn't clamber over without knocking it down.'

We writers get used to this sort of criticism after some great exhausting labour; and I should not have thought Nehemiah would have much minded such sneers.

But ridicule is wonderfully stinging to those who are not hardened to it by use, and he felt it bitterly; he appealed to God to judge these scorers, and went on building.

Then the heathen leaders dropped their sorry jests, and prepared to attack the builders with armed men, and so crush the work with violence and blood. So sure of the result were they that they let out their tactics. They said: 'These builders shall not see us, nor know at what part to expect us; in a moment we will be in the midst of them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease.'

SINGLEHEART, CAPTAIN.

Forewarned, forearmed. Nehemiah instantly withdrew a number of men from the works, and

armed them to the teeth, and disposed them in stations as for the defence of a city. He also girt a sword on every builder, and put a javelin into one of his hands. Then he took a lofty station, with a band of warriors round him, and a trumpeter by his side. He circulated an order that wherever the trumpet should sound, thither all his men should run, with their weapons, from every side.

So wrought they, trowel in one hand, javelin in another, swords by their side, and a great leader's eye over all; and one-half their force paraded with shield and spear 'from the rising of the morn till the stars appeared at eve.' At night they all watched under arms, and no man put off his clothes except to wash them. Night and day were one to these gallant men till the mighty work was done: so can the spirit of a great leader animate a host, and make each pawn a knight, each mason a hero.

The heathen leaders swallowed their boast, and never made a single attack. By that means they saved their skins, for if they had attacked

a weak part of the walls, Nehemiah would have seen them from his elevation, and run to meet them with his picked men, sounding the trumpet as he ran. Then his soldiers and armed builders would have run in upon the foe from every side, and cut them to pieces in a moment. So the heathen leaders did not fight, but tried assassination.

SINGLEHEART, POLITICIAN.

Sanballat and Geshem sent a friendly message to decoy Nehemiah to his death. 'Come,' said they, 'why should we quarrel over the matter? No doubt we can come to some friendly arrangement. Meet us in the plains of Ono; there are several villages there; choose which you like for this amicable meeting.'

Sorry schemers! Fancy these shallow traitors sending this to an Oriental statesman!—a bare hook without a bait. He did not condescend to be angry, or show them he saw through them. He parried the proposal with cool contempt. 'I am doing a great work; why should I leave it and interrupt it to come to *you*?'

They sent a similar message four times. Then Nehemiah did a first-rate thing. Instead of varying his reply in the least, he sent the same formula four times, and I am all admiration at this; for, after all, when you have given a good answer, why admit even a shadow of imperfection in that answer by altering a word or two? And then, how like a rock it makes a man seem, to give the waves but one answer: immovability, whether they surge up or ripple up, come at him smiling or foaming.

Irritated by this granite contempt, Sanballat deviated from the Oriental into the ruffian; he did what corresponds in our day to sending an abusive post-card. He actually sent a letter, wide open, for everybody to read before it reached Nehemiah, and thus ran this ill-bred pagan's lines:

'It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu confirms it, that you and the Jews mean to rebel against Artaxerxes, and that you have built the wall with this object, and to be king yourself; and that you have bribed pro-

phets to say there is a king in Jerusalem. We shall report all this to Artaxerxes unless you meet us as invited, and come to terms with us.'

This open letter was well calculated to alarm. Lies of the sort sent from Jerusalem had ere now poisoned the monarch's mind in Persia, and arrested a good work in Judea for many a long day.

Nehemiah sent him back an open letter in return. 'There are no such things done as you pretend; you are feigning them all out of your own heart.'

From that hour the enemy resigned all direct attacks on him, but still endeavoured to detach a few friends from him; and here they had some success, having intermarried with Jewish families.

HIS CHIVALROUS SPIRIT.

The worst trap of all was now laid for him: a singularly wicked one, to catch him by means of his piety, and his desire to know God's will in

all things. The prophet Shemaiah and the prophetess Noadiah foretold a great danger, and that he could escape it only by shutting himself up in the Temple and closing the doors. This time, with all his sagacity, he did not divine treachery. Not his wisdom, but his high spirit, saved Singleheart from this trap.

‘What!’ said he; ‘shall such a man as I am flee? And what man, intrusted with God’s work, would skulk into the Temple merely to *save his life?*’

‘I WILL NOT GO IN.’

Talk of lines like the sound of a trumpet: why, this was to speak thunder-bolts and act lightning. Here we see in action what the heathen poet taught in noblest song:

‘Summum crede nefas animam præferre pudori
Et propter vitam vivendi perdere causas.’

After Singleheart had escaped this trap by his courage and his fidelity to a single purpose, he found that these prophecies came from lying prophets suborned by Tobiah and Sanballat.

Then in the spirit of his dispensation he invoked on their heads the curse of that God they had blasphemed.

After a feeble attempt to work upon the Jews they had intermarried with, Tobiah and Sanballat disappear from the narrative.

The walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt in fifty-two days, and Singleheart gave the glory to God. Taking the work and the time together, is there a parallel to this achievement? The Chinese Wall and the great Pacific Railway are far greater works, and much of the latter was built with the pick in one hand and the revolver in the other. But then, these vast works took years to complete.

Looking at the size of the city, the great height and breadth of the walls, it was an enormous work; much greater than the London Law-Courts, that have taken a dozen years to build—greater than the cathedral of Cologne, which has been centuries in hand. And when you consider that these walls were built in the teeth of an armed and implacable foe,

built with the trowel in one hand, the javelin in the other, and that the sleep of the workmen was broken with watching, and their clothes never taken off except to wash them, and flung on again half dry, it was an unrivalled feat of labour, zeal, judgment, courage, and piety, and will so remain to the end of time.

NEHEMIAH, REFORMER.

Ezra came to Jerusalem fourteen years before Nehemiah; he left the holy seed of Judah pure at Babylon, but found it at Jerusalem mingled with that of idolaters.

When he discovered this he rent his garment and mantle, and plucked off the hair of his head and beard, and sat down astonished until the evening sacrifice.

But during that solemnity he rose and threw himself down at the gate of the Temple, and prayed and wept and confessed the sins of his people.

His sorrow and his eloquence touched many

hearts, and led to a public confession and to solemn pledges of reformation, especially from such of the offenders as belonged to Levi, Ezra's own tribe.

But it is clear from Nehemiah's own account that intermarriage with heathen, and other abuses, proved too strong for Ezra in the long-run. Nehemiah found this malpractice and many others at Jerusalem. Indeed, his great enemy, the heathen Tobiah, owed much of his power to having married a Jewess of good family. Nehemiah set himself to reform this, but not this alone. He was not a better, but a greater, man than Ezra, and made wiser reforms, and kept them alive, which Ezra failed to do.

One thing that shocked him much was the usurious practices of the wealthier Jews, and their cruelty in selling their poor debtors into bondage. 'What!' said he; 'we have redeemed our brethren that were sold unto the heathen, and will ye sell your brethren?' and they found nothing to answer.

Then he reminded them he had power to levy

large exactions upon *them*, and besought them to imitate his moderation.

Such was the power of his example and his remonstrances that he actually induced the creditors to restore to the ruined debtors their houses, vineyards, and olive-yards, and a little of the forfeited produce to keep them alive through the famine.

When the relenting creditors had bound themselves to this by oath, he took his tunic in both hands and shook it, and said, 'May God so shake out every man from his house and from his labour who performeth not this promise.'

This was a master-stroke, and shows the man of genius. Such appeals to the senses as well as to the conscience take the whole mind by assault, and fix the matter for ever in the memory. His hearers cried 'Amen!' and praised the Lord, and—kept their promise.

All preceding governors of Jerusalem had acted on their powers and bled the people themselves, and even let their servants oppress and

pillage them. Not so Nehemiah; with him it was more blessed to give than to receive. He kept a noble table, and entertained one hundred and fifty Jews every day from the city, besides hungry souls from the villages; but all this at his own expense; the governor's allowance he never touched, because, as he said, the people were burdened enough without that. His mind runs forward, and he relates this a little out of place—chapter v. 13-19. I have but placed it in its true sequence. It is a noble trait, and every generous heart goes with him, when with honest simplicity he bursts out, 'Think on me, my God, for good, according to all I have done for this people.'

Though he was nominal governor of Jerusalem for twelve years from the date of his first visit, it would seem, on a careful comparison of all his statements, that Hanani and Hananiah acted for him by his own appointment during a portion of that time as well as after it had expired. But as Ezra, both before and after Nehemiah's arrival, was unable to cope persistently with the

abuses of the day, so Nehemiah's own lieutenants failed to withstand them.

Probably Nehemiah himself felt there was no one in whom he could place a blind confidence; for, twelve years after his first visit, he came back to Jerusalem with enlarged powers, and this time he showed priests as well as laymen he was not a man to be trifled with.

Eliashib the priest had given his kinsman Tobiah the heathen an apartment in the Temple, and Tobiah had furnished it.

Nehemiah bundled out all his furniture and effects, and had the rooms purified after him.

He found a priest, grandson of this very Eliashib, married to a heathen. He chased him out of the Temple.

On the other hand, he found that certain lay rulers, whose business it was to see the tithes paid to the priests and Levites, had so neglected them that many of that sacred tribe were working in the fields for a bare subsistence.

Nehemiah rebuked these negligent officials, and established storehouses for the tithes of corn,

new wine, and oil; and to secure the Levites against any future neglect in the distribution of these stores, he selected Shelemiah, a priest, Zadok, a scribe, and Pedaiah, a Levite, as almoners or distributors of these stores, and associated with them one Hanan, a man of approved fidelity.

Both priests and laymen had become loose in observing the Sabbath day. He found Jews treading the wine-presses, gathering in the harvests, and trading on the Sabbath day, and men of Tyre bringing fish and other wares into the markets of the city.

He treated natives and aliens alike, stopped the home trade, and closed the gates of the city against the Tyrians.

But the Tyrians were hard to deal with; they lodged outside the wall, and offered their wares outside. 'Do that again,' said Nehemiah, 'and I will lay hands on you.' This frightened them away for good.

Then came his worst trouble, the persistent intermarriage with heathen.

Ezra had withstood this for years in vain.

Nehemiah had combated it with partial success ; yet now Nehemiah found Jews who had married wives of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab, and their children could not speak Hebrew, but naturally spoke their mother-tongue.

Then he came out in a new character. He contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God not to give their daughters to heathen husbands nor their sons to heathen wives again.

After this outburst of impassioned zeal, which at first takes the student of his mind a little by surprise, he returned to his grave character, and reasoned the matter with those he had terrified into submission.

‘What Jew,’ said he, ‘was ever so wise, so great, so beloved of God, as King Solomon? Yet outlandish women could make even him sin against God, and commit idolatry.’

Nehemiah prevailed, and there is reason to believe that idolatry received its death-blow under his rule.

He ends his brief but noble record with his favourite prayer, 'Remember me, O my God, for good.' That prayer has long been granted. But the children of God on earth have not seen all his value. Do but enumerate the various parts he played, the distinct virtues he showed, the strokes of genius he extemporized—and all to serve, not himself, but his country and his God. Faithful courtier, yet true patriot; child of luxury, yet patient of hardship; inventive builder, impromptu general, astute politician, high-spirited gentleman, inspired orator, resolute reformer—born leader of men, yet humble before God.

He rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem; he restored the law of Moses. Tradition says he lived fifty years after the events he records; he probably returned to Persia; but if he did, he was not the man to stay there half a century and leave the city and the law to take care of themselves.

Character is a key to facts; and it was not in Nehemiah's character to live and desert the two great works of his life for fifty years or so.

When, after two centuries of small events, small men, and no history, big events and the big men they generate came again to Judea and raised history from the dead, we find the stamp of Nehemiah and his pupils marked on the Jewish mind so plainly that the story of the Maccabees seems but a natural sequence of Nehemiah's chronicle.

Nehemiah fought tooth and nail for all the law of Moses, and especially the Sabbath day. Nehemiah tore the holy seed out of the embraces of the heathen, and ended the moral influences of idolatry.

This was sure to drive the idolater, sooner or later, from the bloodless weapons that alone can conquer the mind, to persecution and brute force; and accordingly, in the next Hebrew record, behold those weapons levelled against constant souls, and the sword of heroic Judas.

Nehemiah, then, is not what hasty judges have called him, 'one of the lesser lights.' He is a gigantic figure that stalked across the page of history luminous, then glided into the dark abyss

of time, but scattered sparks of historic light, and left, not one, but two immortal works behind him.

As to the character of his piety, he relies on God, seeks His glory, and is unceasing in good works for his nation. But then, he despised lucre, and sought not the praise of men for those works.

It is no small matter to look to God alone, with much light or little. He lived under a covenant of works, and thought accordingly; yet methinks he needed but a word or two from Christ's own lips to be a Christian saint.

V.

JONAH.

JONAH, the son of Amittai, figures amongst the prophetic writers, but he was not one; he was only a seer, like Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, the prophet that came out of Judah, and many others. Like them, his inspiration was occasional, but taught him something of the mind of God (Jonah iv. 1). His other predictions are lost for want of a chronicler, but a master-hand has recorded his great prophecy and the strange events that preceded and followed it. This little Hebrew seer suddenly received a grand and startling commission—to go to the banks of the Tigris and threaten the oldest, largest, and wickedest city in the world with speedy destruction for its sins. That still, small voice, which no mortal had ever defied, thrilled

Jonah's ear. 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.'

Here was an honour for a petty seer. His betters would have received it with pious exultation. Samuel, or Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, John the Baptist, or Paul, would have risen like lions, and gone forth with strong faith and pious pride to thunder against great Nineveh. But this strange man received the order silently, and silently evaded it. He did not hang his head and object like poor crushed Moses, when the hot patriotism of his youth had been cooled into apathy by exile, family ties, and forty years' intercourse with Midianitish bullocks. Jonah received the Divine command, quietly turned his back upon it and on Nineveh, fled to the seaport Joppa, and sailed in a ship for distant Tarshish.

So imperfect was his inspiration at this time that he thought the hand of the God that he served could not reach him on a foreign sea.

They got into blue water, and such was his

confidence that he told the ship's company he was flying from the tutelary God of Palestine. His hearers, no more enlightened than himself received his communication with no misgivings.

But presently a mighty tempest from the Lord fell upon the sea, and the ship was in mortal danger. The mariners were terrified, and cried every man to his God, and, not trusting too much to that, threw the cargo overboard. But there was one man who did not share their apprehensions. He went quietly to sleep, and neither the roaring sea, the whistling wind, nor the poor, creaking, labouring ship disturbed him. And of all the people whose lives were in such peril, who was this one calm sleeper?

It was Jonah.

But the shipmaster came to him, and shook him, and insisted on his calling on his God. But lo! the peril increased, and from the suddenness and violence of the storm, they began to suspect the anger of the gods against some person in that doomed vessel. So they cast lots to learn who was the culprit, and the

lot fell on Jonah. Then they questioned him as to his country and occupation, hoping, somehow or other, to gather how he had offended heaven.

Then Jonah, who now realized his folly and the narrow views he had taken of Him who is omnipresent and almighty, replied. 'I am an Hebrew ; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, *who hath made the sea and the dry land.*'

Then the quaking mariners remembered he had told them he was flying from his God ; and now behold that God, by his own confession, was not a local divinity, but the creator of sea and land.

Connecting this new revelation with the sudden tempest and their increasing peril, the men were in mortal fear, and put a terrible question to Jonah : ' What shall we do to you to save our own lives ?'

Then Jonah, faulty as his character was, shone out like the sun. No shirking ; no craven subterfuges. He looked them in the face and said :

' What you must do is, lay hold on me, and

cast me into the sea, so shall the sea be calm to you; for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.'

Thus did Jonah show himself a prophet and a man. Though terror-stricken, murderous eyes glared on him, and the fearful sea yawned and raged for him, he was so true and so just that he delivered his own doom unflinchingly.

Nobility begets nobility; and the partners of his peril could not bear to sacrifice a man in whom they saw no evil, but, on the contrary, justice, heroism, and self-sacrifice. The poor, honest fellows said, 'Anything but that,' and chose rather to be wrecked on shore. Their ship, after all, was but a galley lightened of its cargo, so they got out their long oars and made a gallant effort to row their trireme ashore, and there leave her bones, but save their own lives and that self-sacrificing hero. This was not to be. Sixty hands labouring at those oars could not prevail against the one hand that hurled the raging sea at that labouring galley and drove her from the land.

Then these doomed men resigned themselves to the will of Jonah's God. They cried to Him most pathetically, 'We beseech thee, O Lord, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life.' And on the other hand, they begged that if Jonah was innocent his blood might not be laid on them, since they had done all they could to learn the Divine will. And when they had so prayed, they took up Jonah and cast him into the sea.

No doubt, as that pale but unflinching face went down without a cry or murmur, they looked on awhile with horror and misgiving; but not for long; the sea subsided as if by magic. The waves were calmed, the wind abated, the vessel was saved. The rescued mariners worshipped the God of Jonah.

To his late companions Jonah was lost for ever. But God chastises His rebellious servants—not destroys them. Some monster of the deep was sent to that ship's side, and swallowed up Jonah as he sank.

It was a terrible punishment. Think of it ! For all these things are skimmed so superficially that they never really come home to the mind, least of all to the mind that is bent on preaching doctrines and not on comprehending facts. The man found himself in a place cold as death and dark as pitch ; no room to move hand or foot. After the first shock of utter amazement, the sliminess, the smell, the water rushing through the fish's gills, must have told him where he was. Oh, then conceive his horror ! So he was not to die in the sea and there an end ; but to lie in the belly of a great fish till he rotted away ; or to be brought up within range of the creature's teeth and gnawed away piecemeal and digested in fragments.

Take my word for it, the poor wretch passed many hours of agony, expecting a slow death of torment, and would have given the world to be vomited into the raging sea and perish by drowning—a mild and common death.

But as the hours rolled on and death came no nearer, he began to hope a little, and to repent

more and more. The man was soon crushed into that state of self-abasement and penitence, out of which a forgiving God often raises His faulty servants to great honour and happiness. He prayed to God out of the fish's belly, and said :

‘I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me ; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice. For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas ; and the floods compassed me about : all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight ; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. The waters compassed me about, even to the soul : the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains ; the earth with her bars was about me for ever : yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God. When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord : and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple. I will sacrifice unto thee

with the voice of thanksgiving: I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord. And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.'

Who was now the happiest man in all the world? Why, this forgiven sinner; this punished, humbled, rewarded rebel.

To him life was ten times sweeter; the sunshine, the shelly beach, the purple sea, with its myriad dimples and prismatic hues, ten times more lovely than to other men.

Lazarus was happy, returning from the grave to his beloved Master, and his darling sisters that wept on his neck for joy.

Happy was the widow's only son, whom the Master, mighty yet tender, delivered with His own hand from his coffin to his bereaved mother, wild with amazement and maternal love. But both these men came back from the neutral state of mere unconsciousness to daylight and the joys of life.

Not so Jonah. He had been buried alive, and

came back from the sickening horror of a living tomb, from a darkness and a death that he felt, to the warm bright sunshine, the glittering sand painted with radiant shells, the purple sea smiling myriad dimples and rainbowed with prismatic hues.

Whilst he gazed at these things with a rapture they had never yet created in him, and poured out his soul in gratitude, there came to him once more the still, small voice of his Master, clear, silvery, dispassionate, and divinely beautiful.

‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.’

Jonah now obeyed with alacrity and went to Nineveh, strong in his Divine commission.

Nineveh having perished about two centuries before Herodotus visited the Tigris, we have no better authority as to its size and population than the words of the Book of Jonah. We may, however, rely on the universal tradition that it was a city of vast size and magnificence, and three days’ journey in circuit by Jewish com-

putation, or 480 Greek stadia, which two measurements agree, being sixty English miles.

It was a brilliant and luxurious city, at the head of the world in general magnificence and in the fine arts.

A rude Hebrew seer came from a country inferior in every mental quality but knowledge of God, and threatened this magnificent city with destruction in forty days, if the people did not repent their sins and turn to the true God.

The thing to be expected was that the townspeople would laugh at him for a day or two, and then drag him through their gutters, or whip him through the streets with his prophecy pinned to his back in cuneiform letters.

But Jonah, inspired by God, and being, so to speak, a prophet raised from the dead to do a great work, preached with supernatural power, and bowed these Assyrian hearts, from the throne to the cabin. The King of Nineveh, the greatest monarch of the day, rose up from his throne at the preaching of Jonah, laid his royal robe in the dust and sat on the ground in sackcloth and

ashes, a picture of lowly penitence, and an example which all his people followed. They fasted, not by halves, but to the confines of torture. They tasted neither food nor drink, and they kept food and drink from their herds, their flocks, and their beasts of burden. They covered themselves and their cattle with sackcloth; they abstained from the sins that Jonah had denounced, and cried for mercy to the God of this Boanerges. Then God saw, pardoned, and spared.

Here was a triumph for Jonah—alone, and with no human help, he had terrified and converted the greatest city in the world. Even egotism, if humanized by benevolence, could have found gratification in this. But poor Jonah was all egotism. A witty Frenchman has defined an egotist as a character who will burn down another man's house to cook himself two eggs. Jonah was quite up to the mark of this definition. He would have burned down a populous and penitent city to enjoy his one egg, the *amour propre* of a seer.

He was sore displeased, and complained to the Lord. He even said—though I cannot say I *quite* believe him—that this was the only reason why he had fled to Tarshish. He knew his prophecy would prove an empty menace, for said he, ‘I know that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. *I wish I were dead.*’

Now, if any one of us had been allowed to speak for God, we should have come down on this egotist like a sledge-hammer.

What! do you cast in God’s teeth that quality by which alone you have yourself escaped destruction? Return, then, to the belly of that shark, and there, in the darkness of your eyes, let light visit your soul blinded by egotism.

Come, now—shall penitent Jonah and penitent Nineveh be destroyed for their repented sins? or shall both be saved, and God be consistent, though man, Jonah included, is not?

But God never talks like that. He is better than man at man’s best. Man forgives, but re-

members, and sometimes even alludes. God, when He forgives, obliterates. It is so throughout the sacred books, and although neither the Hebrew writers nor any other writers can comprehend or describe the infinite God, yet they all reveal this fragment of His infinite nature with a consistency that bears the stamp of truth and excludes the idea of invention.

When Jonah stood by the seaside saved from death, God did not say to him, 'See what comes of resisting my will!' He obliterated what He had forgiven, and merely repeated His command about Nineveh without an unkind word. And now that His wayward servant reproached Him with His weakness in forgiving penitent Chaldeans, He only said to him with more than maternal sweetness, 'Doest thou well to be angry?'

This did not melt the angry Jonah. He turned his back on the city, which he hated for not fulfilling his prediction punctually. He went out into the fields and sat down to see whether God would really be so cruel as to

mortify Jonah and save 600,000 people, not one of whom was Jonah.

God pitied His servant exposed to the mid-day heat, and prepared a gourd to comfort his aching head, and afterwards instruct his heart.

Then Jonah enjoyed great happiness. All the day he looked upon a wonder of nature. A lovely gourd came up from the ground, growing slowly but perceptibly, and reared and expanded its huge succulent leaves till they formed a thick canopy over the head of the favoured prophet.

Then Jonah rejoiced in the impenetrable shade of this lovely plant, and began to be half reconciled to the prolonged existence of Nineveh.

Then the gourd entered on its second office. The Almighty had planted a worm in the gourd, and the worm was enabled to destroy it as rapidly as it had grown.

Then did the sun and the hot wind beat on Jonah's head, and he cried once more, as our foolish women do when things go wrong, 'I wish I were dead.'

Then God said to Jonah, tenderly, 'Doest thou well to be angry?'

Ungracious Jonah replied roughly, 'I do well to be angry, even unto death.'

Then came the still, small voice, sweet yet clear, gentle yet mighty and penetrating, which no patriarch but Jonah ever resisted so long; and even he must yield to it at last. 'Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left; and also much cattle?'

Now, if the reader of Jonah is curious to know whether he left Nineveh as great an egotist as he entered it, I can only give him one man's opinion, but it is not a hasty one. In the first place, the Omniscient is not to be defeated; why should Jonah's egotism resist Him to the end? any more than Jonah's flight baffled Him for more than a day or two?

Prima facie, the Almighty must conquer the heart of Jonah, since He knows the way to every heart.

Starting from this safe position, I ask myself why so faulty a man as Jonah was so honoured? Clearly it was not because of his rebellious spirit, nor his egotism; but in spite of them.

Probably he was a man of pure life and morals; certainly he was the soul of truth. Why should not the God of truth select as a vehicle of prophecy the brave, truthful man, who, facing desperate men with the sea raging on him at his back, could say, 'The truth is, you must take me up and fling me into the sea; for with my just execution the storm will abate.'

Jonah did not write the book, but he must have communicated the facts and the main particulars of the dialogue.

Now, no *unconverted* egotist tells a tale so fairly throughout, and the concluding dialogue so thoroughly against himself, as it is done in this book. You read this dialogue between God and a man; and the writer is a man. A man

yourself, you are shocked at the man, and you bless God.

Moreover, he has given God the last word and the best. Now, no unconverted egotist ever did that, nor ever will. The unconverted egotist is to be found in a thousand autobiographies; catch him giving an opponent the last word, or the best!

I have little doubt, therefore, that Jonah went home a converted egotist, and that when he came to think quietly over it all, he yielded to Divine instruction, and that his character kept improving to the last day of his life.

Of course I reject the conventional theory that Jonah, being a prophet, had no personal weakness under his skin, and wished penitent Nineveh to be destroyed only because he feared for his own nation if it was left standing. If he foresaw the captivity at all, he must have known that the danger was to be from Babylon, after Nineveh had been centuries extinct. Long after Jonah, Nahum threatened Nineveh, but did not fear it.

These skimmers forget that, if Jonah was faultless, God must have been imperfect, since God and he were in direct opposition; and that not once, but twice. The Book of Jonah is generally underrated; one reason is, it is judged by commentators, who have never tried to tell an immortal story, so they underrate a man immeasurably their superior, since the able narrator is above the able commentator, and high as heaven above the conventional commentator, who is mad after types, and who follows his predecessors, who follow theirs, 'ut anser trahit anserem.'

The truth is, that 'Jonah' is the most beautiful story ever written in so small a compass.

Now, in writing it is condensation that declares the master; verbosity and garrulity have their day, but only hot-pressed narratives live for ever. The Book of Jonah is in forty-eight verses, or one thousand three hundred and twenty-eight English words.

Now, take one thousand three hundred and twenty-eight words in our current narratives:

how far do they carry you? Why, ten to one, you get to nothing at all but chatter, chatter, chatter. Even in those close models, 'Robinson Crusoe,' the 'Vicar of Wakefield,' 'Candide,' 'Rasselas,' one thousand three hundred and twenty-eight words do not carry the reader far; yet in the one thousand three hundred and twenty-eight words of Jonah you have a wealth of incident, and all the dialogue needed to carry on the grand and varied action. You have also character, not stationary, but growing just as Jonah's grew, and a plot that would bear volumes, yet worked out without haste or crudity in one thousand three hundred and twenty-eight words.

Then, there is another thing. Only the great artists of the pen hit upon the perfect proportions of dialogue and narrative. With nineteen story-tellers out of twenty there is a weary excess of dialogue. Nor are all the sacred narratives so nicely proportioned as Jonah. In Job the narrative is so short as to be crude and uninteresting compared with the events handled, and

the dialogue is excessive, and in some places false, since similar sentiments and even similar words are given to different speakers. In the Apocrypha, 'Judith' and 'Tobit' are literally massacred by verbosity and bungling; not so, however, in 'Susannah and the Elders'—that is a masterpiece as far as it goes.

To my mind, speaking merely as an artist, the Acts of the Apostles eclipses all human narratives,

'Stellas exortus uti Ætherius sol;'

and in the Old Testament, Genesis, Samuel, Jonah, and Ruth stand pre-eminent, and Jonah above sweet Ruth by the greater weight of the facts and the introduction of the Deity. And oh, the blindness of conventional critics, groping Hebrew records not for pearls of facts, but pebbles of dogma! They have failed to observe that the God of Jonah is the God of the New Testament. Yet it is so, and this great book connects the two Bibles, instead of contrasting them and sore perplexing every honest mind with a changeable Deity.

No doubt the God of the New Testament can be found, or heavenly glimpses of Him, in the Hebrew prophets. But how about the historians? The truculent writers of Joshua, Judges, and Samuel have surely now and then coloured the unchangeable God from their own minds and their own state of civilization.

The Book of Jonah is not a book of prophecy, but just as much a history as Samuel ; yet in the history of Jonah, written long before Isaiah, God is the God of the New Testament ; the God we all hope to find in this world and the next.

Were there no other reason, every Christian may well cling to the Book of Jonah. As to the leading miracle which staggers some people who receive other miracles, these men are surely inconsistent. There can be no scale of the miraculous. To infinite power it is no easier to pick up a pin than to stop all the planets in their courses for a time and then send them on again.

Say there never was a miracle and never will be, and I differ with, but cannot confute, you. Deny

the creation and the possibility of a re-creation or resurrection; call David a fool for saying, 'It is he that hath made us and not we ourselves,' and a wise man for suggesting that, on the contrary, molecules created themselves without a miracle, and we made ourselves out of molecules without a miracle; and although your theory contradicts experience as much as, and staggers credulity more than, any miracle that has ever been ascribed by Christians or Jews to infinite power, I admit it is consistent, though droll.

But once grant the creation of a hundred thousand suns and a million planets, though we never in our short span saw one created; grant the creation of men, lions, fleas, and sea anemones, though all such creations are contrary to our experience; and it is a little too childish to draw back and say that our Creator and re-Creator is only the Lord of flesh, and that fish are beyond His control.

Clearly, infinite power can create a new fish in Jewish waters, or despatch an old fish in the

millionth of a second from the Pacific to the shores of Palestine.

Now to go from power to wisdom, is this miracle a childish one? does it smack of human invention?

What were the objects to be gained by it? A rebellious servant was to be crushed into submission, yet not destroyed. He was to feel the brief agony of death by drowning, then to be laid in a horrible dark prison till he repented, then to be restored to the world in a fit state of mind and body to take a long journey and threaten the greatest city in the world.

Tackle all those difficulties, effect all those just and wise objects, invent your own miracle, and perhaps when you compare it with Jonah's, you will think very highly of the latter, and not so highly of the whole army of skimmers, who have discredited and sneered at a record they have never tried hard to comprehend:

'Facile judicat qui pauca considerat.'

VI.

DAVID.

THIS is the widest character on record. Of course there are other famous men who fill more pages. But, remember, three lives of David, written in his own time, are lost; and the books that survive give only the man's cream. Had his chroniclers pursued the modern method, our shelves would have groaned under their tomes. But in their age, if pure discourse was sometimes diffuse, narrative was always severely concise: they sank a thousand minor details that would be sure to interest us now, and kept strictly to those great deeds and words which seemed peculiar to David, and indeed remain so to this hour.

History thus compressed is a crucible of

character : in it mediocrity evaporates, and even celebrity shrivels. In Holy Writ, Moses, Elijah, and Paul ; in profane history, Solon, Alexander, Cæsar, Charlemagne, Napoleon, and others, excelled David greatly in one quality or another. David presents a greater number of distinct and striking features than any one of those great men ; and that is why I style him the widest character on record—a shepherd, a soldier, a courtier, a famous friend, a fugitive, an actor, a marauder, a general, a king, a statesman, an exile, a priest, a prophet, a saint, a criminal, a penitent : and nothing by halves.

This boy killed a lion hand to hand, and knocked down a mail-clad giant like a sparrow. This man was hunted for his life like a wolf, and spared his pursuer like a lamb. This warrior conquered armies, and even his own passions, yet one day unruly desire laid him low. He became the heartless assassin of a husband he had abused.

This hero invented chivalry two thousand years before the knights who have gained the

credit for it. This bard versified the sorrows of his soul, and sang them to boot, long before we were told of poets that

‘They learn in suffering what they teach in song.’

This magnanimous minstrel lauded and bewailed his dead foe in deathless lines ; this tuneful preacher, in an Eastern province and a bygone age, has comforted bleeding hearts throughout the globe, and will while earth shall last. Merciful in an age of blood ; yet sometimes extremely hard and cruel. Brave, generous, meek, irritable, forgiving, vindictive, pious, sensual, criminal, contrite—greatest of all in penitence, man’s most redeeming quality ; for his repentance had no limit but his light. He never saw a sin in himself that he did not mourn and weep for it heart, soul, and body.

And, to conclude the chapter of his anomalies, he foretold the Saviour of the world, and lived, upon the whole, as if he knew Him. Yet when he came to die, far from forgiving his enemies, he drew back his pardon from those he had forgiven, and left his own son a legacy of blood—a sad

heathen act for a dying saint, to whom the Great Forgiver had pardoned worse crimes than Shimei's ; yet as profitable to the upright reader as anything in all his strange, eventful history, since here he left mankind an exemplary proof how much Christ's personal teaching was needed, and how great a boon it was, and is, to mortal man.

VII.

PAUL'S PERSEVERANCE.

'And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them. And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city ; and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through great tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.'—*Acts* xiv. 18-22.

SCRIPTURE is so full of heavenly food, that often a single text furnishes more than one sermon. In these cases the text is generally a precept. In the narrative portion matters are of necessity not so condensed as all that, and a whole passage,

containing several verses, takes the place of a *text*.

For example, here are four verses it would be unwise to separate for the purposes of discourse, and wise to read them all four with care, and consider what they reveal: what a picture of human nature, and of God's grace!

These marvellous passages of Divine story are so briefly and so simply told, compared with other narratives, that people too often read them and hear them read, without discovering all that lies in them for our edification. They require intelligent and prayerful study, and they repay it, as a mine repays the spade.

Now and then these gems of narrative are lost in part, through a mistaken notion in the mind that they record prodigies—acts we are to admire at a distance, but not try nor hope to imitate them, even at a distance.

Many people look on the Apostles and Saints as superhuman creatures, or as so upheld by the ever-present arm of God that they did their great work, and suffered their great trials, with

none of that difficulty and pain we should have encountered in their place, and are bound to encounter if necessary.

Now, it is wise to revere Apostles and Saints ; but it is most unwise to take them for prodigies. For no man imitates a prodigy—he feels it would be useless. But it is our duty to imitate, to follow the steps of Apostles and Saints, and, more than that, it is our duty to follow them exactly, though it be at ever so humble a distance.

And in this Scripture encourages us. It *tells* us that our Lord Himself was tempted in all things as we are, though without sin, and it *shows* us that He actually suffered much innocent sorrow, grief, mortification, and one dark hour of despairing agony.

We are not invited to believe that, when He wept over Lazarus and the sorrows of his bereaved sisters, He did not feel as brave men feel when they weep for others ; we are not to assume—without a word to justify it—that when He was scourged, buffeted, and spat upon, His poor cheek did not burn with shame ; that when

beaten, and fastened with cruel nails to a cross, His whole human frame did not quiver with pain; nor that when the disciples, whose faith He had so carefully armed for the trial with His earnest, loving words and the commemorative supper, all forsook Him and fled, a sword did not pierce His human heart.

How much more His Apostles, who were entirely human, must have felt their trials just as we should, though grace gave them the victory!

Now, first realize this simple truth, and then put yourselves in the place of Paul at Lystra.

His good work among the heathen began hopefully at Iconium; but by-and-by it was baffled by the unbelieving Jews. Men who worshipped one God actually sided with idolatry through mere hatred of Christ, and, though they never troubled their heads to correct the worship of devils, stirred up the heathen against the ministration of the Gospel, and nearly succeeded in putting those two Apostles to death by stoning, which was the punishment of blasphemy.

They prevailed in part. Paul and Barnabas,

the two greatest benefactors that ever entered Iconium, were compelled to slink out of the place like criminals, or die the death of the blasphemer. Here was mortification and disappointment, all the more bitter that their hopes had been raised at first.

Well, they retired, and did not lose heart, as most of us would have done. They carried their great, rejected boon to Lystra.

Paul was an extempore preacher, and therefore his eye was never on the wrong place, a book or manuscript, but always on the right place, his hearers. He preached to the heathen at Lystra, and observed his hearers keenly—habit of all real orators. Presently he noticed two eyes fixed on him with faith. The great orator saw that those eyes were drinking in the Gospel in earnest. He also observed that this man, who heard so eagerly, and *believed*, was a cripple. Paul stopped in his discourse, and said, with a loud voice: ‘Stand upright on thy feet.’

To the amazement of the audience, the man stood up, leaped, and walked.

Lystra was not a large place ; doubtless this man, a cripple from his birth, was known ; the miracle was evident ; the heathen were not—like the Jews—fortified by prejudice against the evidence of their senses. They took the Apostles for gods, the imaginary gods they had been accustomed to worship, and they proceeded to offer sacrifices to them ; the very priest of Jupiter claimed his part in the ceremony.

Now, this was a temptation of the evil one. We ought not to underrate it merely because it failed. There is no other recorded instance of its failing. Alexander the Great accepted flattery in this impious form. So did Augustus Cæsar and his successors. So did Herod, to his cost.

But Paul and Barnabas were struck with pious horror ; they ran in among the people and rent their clothes, and declared their common humanity, and diverted the blind piety and gratitude of these poor heathen to the true God.

So much for grace.

Now for human nature.

This same fickle mob were presently talked over by the Jews, and made to believe the Apostles were impostors.

Impostors!—and they had cured the lame.

Impostors!—and they had refused divine honours!

This fickle heathen mob acted in concert with these stiff-necked Jews, and amongst them they actually stoned the man they had proposed to worship, and dragged his breathless body outside the city. Lystra was not to be defiled by dead Paul.

A monstrous act, yet perfectly natural. The unwise always run from one extreme to the other, and probably the vanity of these unstable men was wounded at the very thought that they had been on the point of worshipping a couple of Jews, whom their own countrymen now came and denounced as impostors.

Now, stoning a man did not mean flinging small stones at him from a distance. Their way was to drag the victim to his knees, and raise

heavy stones with both hands, and hurl them down on his back, his loins, his neck, his head, till the life was battered out of him.

So was that holy man crushed and pounded to death. He was breathless—he was insensible. So far as the pain of dying was concerned, his poor body suffered all and more than it did a few years later at Rome, when one swift blow of a sword—the most merciful of all his foes, and indeed his kindest friend—released him at once from the burden of the flesh and the battle with sin.

This battered body—the body of the greatest benefactor that ever visited their paltry city—the men of Lystra dragged outside the gates with ignominy, and then returned in contemptuous triumph.

Now realize the scene that followed, ye skimmers of Bible facts, and divers into Bible guesses, and quibblers of dogmas. The murderers are gone. There lies the body of Paul, crushed, bloody, ghastly pale, dirty, deserted by all but a few disciples who stood sadly round, and being

new converts, their faith is oozing fast out of them as they look on that pale and battered saint, who could heal the lame, but could not defend his own life.

But stay—what is this? The body stirs—the crushed one sighs—he moves—he rises feebly, with a little aid. He utters no word of complaint; blames neither his foes for their cruelty, nor his friends for their cowardice. He is unable to travel—he is assisted back into that murderous city: and there he lies racked in every joint.

How long? Six months? Well, then, three?

One afternoon. The next day he limped to Derba. What for? For medical advice probably; for repose, if he could not afford a physician; for a soft couch to lie on and ease his aching frame?

No—to preach the Gospel.

We read his fortitude and his zeal. What it cost him we must learn from our own common-sense. No man is nearly killed by many violent blows and not much hurt. After such cruel

usage pain may intermit, but it does not leave a man in a day, nor yet in a week. Let the saints of this our day, who do God's work in spite of pain, and disease, and weakness, take comfort by example, and be assured that many a throe wrung Paul's stout heart, long after he was stoned and left for dead at Lystra, yet neither pain nor threat could quell him; with aching body, but undaunted heart, he preached God's word at Derbe.

After some bitter trial God often rewards His soldier, even in this world. The Apostles preached at Derbe with great success, and made many converts.

This done, they marched into a neighbouring town. Its name was Lystra.

What Lystra? No doubt there are two Lystras. That was no uncommon thing. This was doubtless some Lystra a hundred miles distant from the Lystra that stoned Paul and dragged his body outside the walls.

No; it was the Lystra that stoned him. He returned to it, not from a tour of towns, but

direct from Derbe, with the pain still in his body, but the Gospel in his indomitable heart.

Iconium had tried to stone him, so he will go there soon, we may be sure; but Lystra had already stoned him, so he will go there first; and, if not killed there, he will go to Iconium and Antioch, the very centres which sent forth those very Jews who all but destroyed him at Lystra. He will beard those very men in their own dens, with the sword of the Gospel and the shield of Faith.

Was this premature return to Lystra bravado or desperation?

It was neither. It was courage and wisdom. Religion, like philosophy, can teach by examples. Paul had a great lesson to teach in those three cities. He had, as the sacred narrative informs us, to confirm the souls of the disciples in those cities, and exhort them to continue in the faith, and teach them that we must through much tribulation enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Now, Paul could do more than *preach* this lesson at Lystra; he could *show* it as powerfully in his

own person, as he had shown the power of God in healing their lame citizen.

Just imagine, for one moment, how the men of Lystra stared with amazement when these two Apostles walked back into their market-place and resumed their preaching, as if no serious interruption had ever occurred.

No details are given of this second visit ; but the result speaks for itself. Reaction reigned their lame fellow-citizen had been walking those streets, showing his limbs, and speaking his mind, we may be sure. No Jews ventured a second experiment upon heathen credulity. Faith, Patience, Fortitude, were more than conquerors even at vile Lystra.

In that terrible conflict of spiritual powers, of which this world is the arena, Satan often wins the skirmish and God the battle.

Now, this great heroic story, told in four verses, reveals nothing absolutely new in Scripture history, and nothing that will ever become obsolete, least of all the great lesson that we must enter Heaven by the Gate of Tribulation.

EVIDENCES OF REVELATION.*

IN the summer of 1880, some fanatics having revived the notion that the pseudo-Tichborne impostor is an illegitimate son of Roger Tichborne's father, I wrote some letters in my nephew's weekly publication *Fact*, entitled 'The Doctrine of Coincidences.' The leading position in them is that the force of unforeseen coincidences is great, and increases in a prodigious ratio when they are multiplied and point to one conclusion; and I also there showed that fifteen independent and unforeseen coincidences all point from different points of the compass to one central fact, that this impostor is Arthur Orton, of Wapping.

I mentioned this in outline to my dear friend

* Apparently the notes for a further statement of the subject.

the Rev. Charles Graham, and he said that unforeseen coincidences were among the evidences of the truth of Scripture. I then remembered that Paley uses them in the '*Horæ Paulinæ*.' I was not aware they had been applied to the Old Testament also. Mr. Graham, however, lent me a volume entitled '*Undesigned Coincidences in the Old and New Testament*,' by the Rev. J. J. Blunt. The writer in his Preface refers to Paley as the writer who had worked this vein the most remarkably; and to Doddridge on 1st Thessalonians, and Biscoe's '*History of the Acts of the Apostles*,' as predecessors who—to use my own phrase—had fingered the idea before him.

Dr. Blunt extends Paley's method to the Old Testament, and observes many unstudied coincidences of statement in the books of Moses.

These he calls generally coincidences; I myself am not quite clear that they are all coincidences. Many seem to be rather subtle consistencies, or statements accidentally corroborative of each other.

A coincidence I should define as two indis-

putable facts pointing to one conclusion. If so, there are three parts in a coincidence, but only two in a corroborative statement.

If I am right in this distinction, Dr. Blunt discovers (pages 9 - 21) many coincidences which, taken in conjunction, point clearly to a Patriarchal Church long before Moses, with (1) places of worship; (2) forms consecrating such places; (3) priests, tithes, and a Sabbath, circumcision, moral enactments against murder, robbery, fornication, adultery (in the limited sense Moses himself understood it), false swearing, disobedience to parents, marriage with idolaters. Also ceremonies: purification, clean and unclean animals (Noah), sacrifices, circumcision.—(Pages 1-23.)

Incidental proofs of the promised Christ he finds in the early sacrifices. And here I would venture to throw in that Cain's sacrifice, which could not typify Christ, was rejected; in the wild eagerness of the women for offspring—a desire that overcame jealousy defied, nature.

And all this with no design on the part of

Moses to elevate those who lived before the law it was his mission to promulgate. This, says the author, is my master-key, explaining and justifying details that are trivial and even offensive without it. Witness the conduct of Sarah, Jacob's wives, Onan, Tamar, etc.

Pages 24-93 are occupied with what I should not call coincidences, but undesigned consistency—one statement unobtrusively confirming another:—

Abraham's intercession for Sodom, and his leaving off at ten.

Lot and his family at Sodom, and Abraham's hope that there would be righteous in that home.

Isaac marrying into a generation below him.

Great age at which Sarah had borne Isaac.

Jochebed, daughter of Levi, marrying a grandson of Levi. Jochebed turns out to have been born in Egypt—child of Levi's old age.

Identity of Jacob's character in so many incidents.

The freight of the camels that carried Joseph into Egypt.

The sepulture of the Egyptians.

The many offhand indications that Egypt was a great corn-grower.

The historical fact that it was so.

The proportion of oxen and waggons assigned to the descendants of Levi.

The apparent fate of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and their families. The subsequent statement that Korah's children died not.

The original account, more closely examined, admitting this solution.

Miraculous water at Horeb.

Altars of Amalekites.

Death of Zimri.

Diminution of the Tribe of Simeon.

The fondness of Joseph for his father, and the way his brothers appeal to it unconsciously.—
(Pages 24-93.)

The character of Jacob, a cowed man. Its consistency.

To these I beg to add:

(1) That the ark is built, or begun, more than one hundred years before the deluge; and the deluge does not come till Methuselah, the son of righteous Enoch, is just dead. Yet the writer does not observe this, and the reader only discovers it by arithmetical computation.

(2) That Rebekah's trait, parental partiality, is found in her favourite son, yet not noticed by the author. And that Jacob, the younger son, blesses the younger son of Joseph before the elder. Yet the writer seems only to notice the bare fact.

(3) That the typical offering of Abel was accepted, but the non-typical offering of Cain rejected. Yet the writer has no theory on the matter.

Balaam slain among the Midianites. Compare with the invitation just given to him.

MONUMENTAL EVIDENCE AND DOCUMENTAL

MONUMENTAL, by physical destruction after its existence has been recorded in words, may pass into mixed evidence; or documental evidence of a quondam monumental.

Example: The writer of Genesis points his readers to the pillar of Rachel's grave, on the way from Bethel to Ephrath, but he does not refer to the pillar of salt that once was Lot's wife, as still existing (Joshua iv. 21).

The period of time, a week, and its universal existence, is a monumental proof of the truth of Moses. Years, months and days are derivable from the sun and moon; but the week is an unnatural division. Yet there never was an age when it did not prevail in India, China, Assyria, Egypt, and it migrated to Greece and Rome.

The world is large, and full of conflicting opinions. How many solutions exist of this arbitrary division—seven days! There is only one known to creation, and that is adequate, for it says the parents of all mankind were taught it by their Creator.

Now try any other solution and it will be found inadequate, and evidently to accept an inadequate solution of an undeniable fact is credulity in one of its weakest forms.

THE END.

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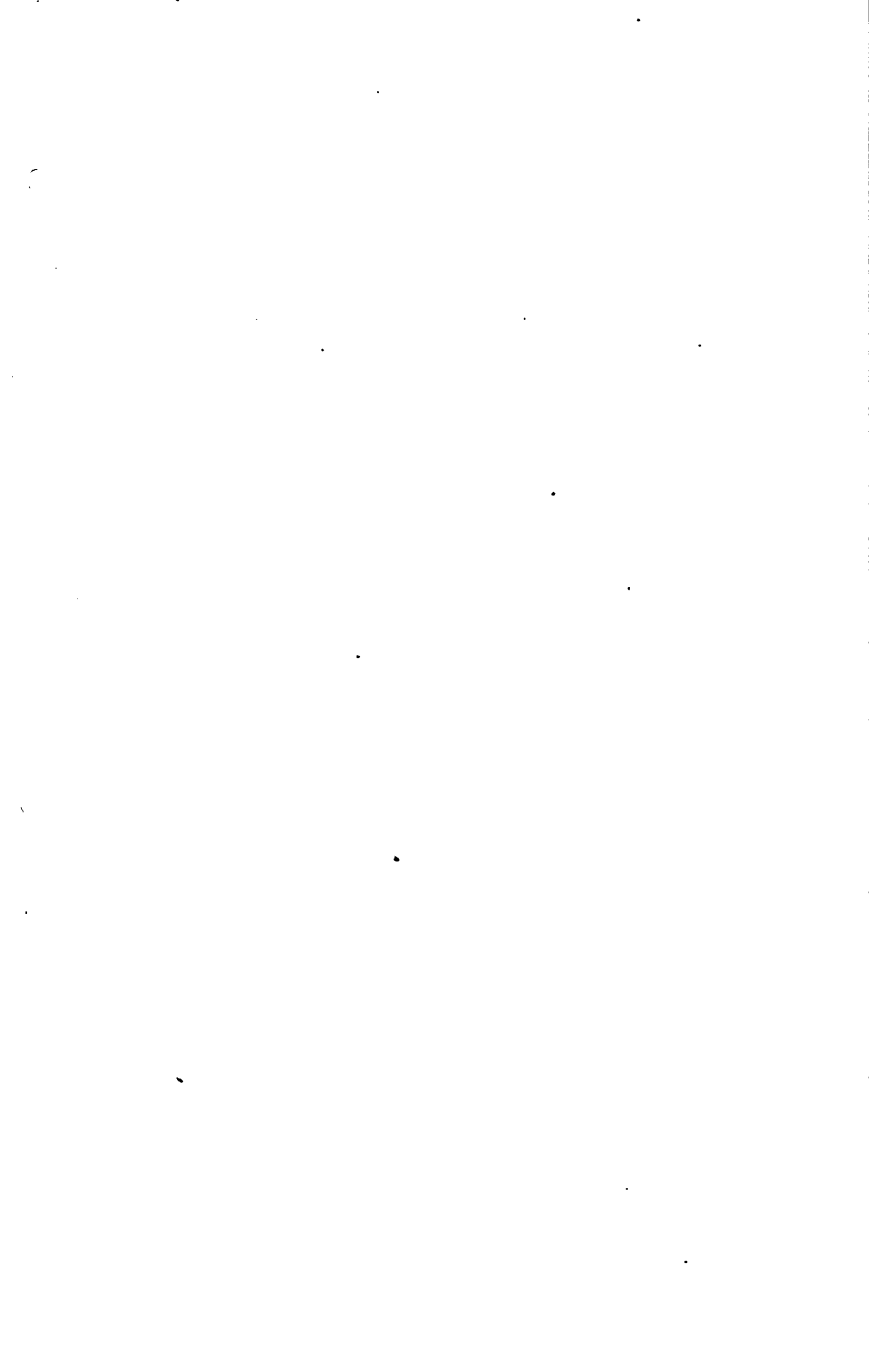
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